cutting: a diary

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August 12

I hate 82nd Avenue. There are too many white people here compared to the northern end of MLK above Killingsworth, where I used to work. For some reason, white men have some problem with fat women and few of them even slow down to check me out, let alone invite me into the vehicle. Most of the drivers who pick me up are and have always been Black and Latino men, who often tell me that they are attracted to large women.

It could also be about race, of course, but I know for a fact that lots of white men like Asian women. Come to think of it, there are many white men who are into "BBW," or big and beautiful women. So perhaps it is about the combination of size and race—there is a big demand for Asian girls, and somewhat smaller demand for BBWs, but there is almost

none for Asian BBWs, at least among white men.

I walk without my cane because having a cane makes me appear and feel more vulnerable at late night. And—I hate to admit this—less attractive. Now that's pretty fucked up but I think it's a reality: people with disabilities are perceived not just as sexually unattractive, but as simply asexual. So I walk many blocks on my sore and exposed legs without a cane or crutches until I cannot take any more and I crawl back to my house. I hate that bus #10 doesn't run after 8pm or on weekends.

August 15

Burger King at Powell and Foster was already closed when I approached its door around 11pm, but the drive-thru window was still open. A driver who had just purchased late night snack calls me out and offers me a Diet Coke. I thought he might want to give me a ride, but I noticed that he had a couple of young children in the back seat. I declined and began walking eastward on Powell.

I saw a girl jumping into a van about two blocks ahead, and they drove off to a side street, maybe 53rd or something. As I passed the street by, I noticed that she was outside the van, holding her hands behind her head. I didn't see a uniformed officer or a police car with flashing light, but I was pretty certain that she was being arrested. I immediately felt scared, as I knew it could have been me if I wasn't hungry, and I didn't attempt to enter Burger King. I got on the #9 bus that happened to stop by, and I was on my way home for the night.

People don't understand why I would work on the street when I don't have drug problem, I don't have a pimp, and I have access to a computer and a cell phone. Sure, it'd be much safer to work off of newspapers, or ErosGuide or TNABoard or something. Honestly, I wish I could too. But I am too afraid to put myself out there on the display case, where men can comparison-shop. I am too afraid that someone who saw the ad would come to

me, and then reject me because I am not what they had expected.

Fat-positive and body-positive feminism is wonderful, but I feel uneasy within it. Instead of being judged by my size and appearance, I feel judged based on how much I have liberated myself from the shame and guilt I continue to feel around my body. Stories after stories in publications such as Body Outlaws celebrate overcoming shame and building pride, but I have difficulty relating to them. Self-hatred runs deeper than my feminist education and awareness.

I came home and I was still feeling scared. At the moment it is difficult to distinguish what I am going through now and what is just something from the past. I dissociate and sink into the bed, like how I've always done since my childhood. I've heard other people float above looking down on themselves, but I tend to sink underneath. When unbearable things are being done to you while you lay in bed, floating above or sinking below seem to be the only options.

August 17

It's that time of the year again and I am fighting the urge to cut. My birthday used to be August 19th, but I changed it about ten years ago after attempting suicide for several years in a row around this time. I've known people who have changed their name and gender, so

changing the birthday felt natural to me.

My birthday is pushed back by five days to August 24th, though I don't even celebrate my new birthday anyway. Throughout my childhood, birthdays were just reminders of how much more valuable and accessible my body had become, and I feel like crying. At least I don't have to cringe and panic every time people ask me when my birthday is, because I now know what to say. But that doesn't mean it's gotten easier to live through August 19th.

Cutting to me is equivalent to taking Xanax, which is equivalent to prostitution. When I feel both intense and numb, hyperventilated and unable to breathe, experiencing flashbacks and dissociation, I need something to bring me back to this time and place. And they

each do it in their own ways. They are all addictive, so I know I need to be careful.

Cutting helps me to focus on being in my body. Somehow, seeing a red line forming on my wrist and arm helps me realise that I am alive now and not in the past. I haven't cut in several years mainly because I don't want to end up in the hospital but paper knife (letter

opener) isn't cutting it anymore and I feel the urge to use the real thing.

Today I was at Fred Meyer browsing different types of knives. There are knives in so many departments—outdoor life, kitchen supply, stationary section, etc. After struggling with myself for thirty minutes or more, I picked up an X-acto knife that was sold for \$3.79. Strangely, my internal debate was about whether or not it's worth spending almost \$4 to cut myself, and not whether or not I should be cutting at all.

I finally decided to purchase the knife, and I began walking to the checkout when my friend called me on the phone. I immediately began crying, "I need you to talk me out of getting a knife," which she did, and I left the knife on the shelf next to cranberry juice. I

bought a pint of Ben & Jerry's ice cream that was on sale for \$3 instead. I wondered if consumption of the ice cream harmed my health more than an X-acto knife in the long run.

Prostitution can also be therapeutic—or at least it helps me pull my mind away from the past and onto here and now. I have to be clear-headed, aware of my surroundings, in order to stay safe from ripoff, violence, and arrest. I am keenly aware of how people look at me, mostly with pity and disgust, and it hurts me, but at least I feel in control of my pain and it is better than the endless re-runs in my head. It is similar to how cutting makes me feel in control because I am holding the knife and the pain is external.

I assume that I do not need to explain what Xanax does to my mind.

August 18

I did it. My wrist feels sore from the sixteen red lines that have been drawn there. It might seem strange, but I really don't like feeling pain or seeing blood. I do feel a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, when I see the red lines. Some counselor has suggested that I use a red marker to draw red lines, or wearing a rubber band around my wrist to snap myself with when I need sharp sensation there, but that's such bullshit. They don't work

and make me crave the real thing even more.

What I've learned to do however is to use a syringe instead of a knife. I had picked up a few syringes at a needle exchange earlier in the week, and it is a form of harm reduction to me. The needle is sharp and fine enough to cut my skin, but not firm enough to cut open a major wound even if I tried to (which I don't, because injuring myself is not the point). I also feel safe using the syringe because it came from the Multnomah County van and is sterile. My friend who suggested using syringes instead of knives years ago is a professional dominatrix, and she apparently uses it for clients who want degrading things curved on their skin. I never had any desire to curve letters on my body, but I'm glad that she told me about it.

August 19

I am surprisingly calm. I guess I dissociated much of the day, and it worked out just fine. I did go to Starbucks to get a free iced coffee for my "birthday"—which isn't really my birthday anymore but my Oregon ID still says it is so I might take advantage of it. I never made it to Baskin Robbins or Ben & Jerry's or Cold Stone Creamery, each of which would have given me a free ice cream cone.

August 20

My old birthday has passed uneventfully, but I still feel intense. August 21st is another date that is causing me great anxiety for the last eight years because of something that happened nine years ago. I was working in San Francisco for the summer, and I had planned to go back to Portland just to pack things up so that I could formally move to the Bay Area when I was assaulted. I had told my boss that I would take a week or two off in Portland and then come back, but I never came back. I did not even call her for two months.

For all these years, I could never be certain if the man knew what he was doing. On one hand, he was clearly someone who had some sort of developmental and cognitive disabilities, and I wonder if I had communicated my intention (or lack thereof) clearly and appropriately. On another, I kept thinking that he was "acting dumb," exaggerating his disability to his advantage. I am disturbed by my own feeling, because as a disability rights activist it feels ableist and offensive. But how can he not understand when I am desperately begging him to stop?

What if he wasn't at fault because he couldn't help it—does that mean it was my fault? That isn't even logical, since there are lots of horrible things that happen for which nobody can be blamed. But I can't stop thinking that if I had communicated better, or defended myself more forcefully, things would have come out differently. I know that it is wrong to

blame victim, but knowing that doesn't keep me from having these thoughts.

When I returned to Portland, I went to see a doctor at Old Town Clinic. The doctor told me that it was something I should have expected when I worked on the street (even though I wasn't working when the attack happened), and she didn't understand why I feel upset by it since I have sex with strangers all the time. She treated me like someone who was seeking Xanax solely to abuse or sell it, and pushed me out with just some samples of Effexor XR (which I already knew didn't work for me). I don't know what bothered me the most—the attack itself, or how I was treated by the doctor when I went in for support.

I cut some more but nothing major. But I am getting worried about being addicted. I called Portland Women's Crisis Line to talk to someone, and I tried to stop cutting while I am on the phone, but I keep picking up the syringe and cutting without even thinking about it. I apologised to the person on the crisis line, and put the syringe in the drawer where I can't see it. It stayed there until the next day.

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August 21

It's the day. Last two times I cut myself, I only cut horizontally and it didn't look gross or anything. But I lost control and cut up and down, sideways, and diagonally all over my wrist. It looked pretty ugly. Worse, the needle has become dull and it is breaking my skin as I try to draw straight lines. I'm sure it was more painful than before, except that I felt too numb to feel more than just light scratches.

In the afternoon I managed to get myself out of house and visited my friends. It was difficult to feel joy but at least it prevented me from cutting further. I even went to the E Room because I was afraid of being by myself, but it was too loud and too crowded so I left. I

called the crisis line back when I got home.

August 23

I called my doctor's office first thing in the morning, and made a same-day appoint-

ment. I had called the office during the weekend and spoken with the doctor on call, so they knew what was going on. I went in and told them that I needed Xanax, which is the only medicine that I feel has worked for me in dealing with panic and flashbacks among all the different anti-depressants, anxiolytics (anti-anxiety medicine), etc. I also asked for topiramate (sold as Topamax), which is an anti-convulsant but is sometimes recommended for off-label use to reduce flashbacks and other symptoms of PTSD.

The doctor agrees to give me a small amount of Xanax (12 pills of 0.25mg each, which is the lowest dosage) and tells me to come back a week later to discuss long-term medication. She explains that it is better to avoid starting two medications at the same time in order to identify any side effects. I think that makes sense, but I am somewhat discouraged.

The nurse came in to disinfect my left wrist, tapes gauze on it, and wraps a net on top. The gauze was probably unnecessary, as my wounds weren't that deep anyway. But it did keep me from touching my wound and cutting further. And strangely I felt really good about it because I felt protected and secure. Also, the ointment worked like a miracle: when I took off the gauze the next day, the wound was healing faster than I had imagined.

August 25

I got through my most difficult time of the year with just a few scars on my wrist, and I'm impressed how quickly they are healing. I've had Xanax for three days now, but I only used it once: I feel better just by carrying Xanas in my purse, because I know it is there to relieve my anxiety when I need one. The lady from the crisis line is suggesting that I join a support group. I'm not sure about that myself, but I am exploring options. I don't want to go through this again next year, but I also don't know if going through a support group or therapy would be easier. But I know I want to stop cutting because I like to go to the pool to swim and I can't swim when I have open wound.